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SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94143

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Dr. Kumao Toyoshima
The Institute of Medical Science
The University of Tokyo
P.O. Takanawa
Tokyo, JAPAN

Dear Kumao:

Thanks for your letter about the inevitable problems over the nomenclature of human leukemia viruses. Personally I share your view that a broad category of human retroviruses should be established, as has been done for other animal species; I would prefer to abbreviate this class as HuLV to maintain a clear distinction from hamster viruses (HaLVs). I agree that the isolates to date should be kept distinct unless they can be shown to be identical (an unlikely prospect); the precedents for (and wisdom of) maintaining such distinctions are obvious within and outside retrovirology. The need to establish a general category might be greater if there were other entries, as I expect will ultimately be the case. It would be premature, in my view, to start naming endogenous HuLV's based solely upon isolation of endogenous proviral-like elements, unless some of these prove to be infectious, with or without helper.

I think it would be sensible to name a sub-committee within the Retrovirus Study Group to consider this issue further and come up with a proposal. I would suggest that Natalie Teich chair the subcommittee and that you, Hinuma, Gallo, and Oroszlan participate.

Let me know what you think of this, and I will then contact the potential members of this subcommittee.

With best regards,

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.
Professor

HEV/jm